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TAGS: PREL PGOV KTER KCRM ASEC KHLS EAGR SENV TU GR  
SUBJECT: INTERIOR MINISTER PLEDGES COUNTERTERRORIST  
COOPERATION/CONCERNS WITH BIOMETRICS

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel V. Speckhard for 1.4 (b) and (d)

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (S) On 16 January 2008, Ambassador Speckhard, accompanied by Regional Affairs (RAS) Counselor Chadason, paid a courtesy call on Interior Minister Prokopis Pavlopoulos and Deputy Interior Minister for Public Order Panayiotis Chinofotis. In his first official meeting with them, the Ambassador stressed the danger posed by terrorism, whether international or domestic, and illegal immigration to U.S. and Greek interests. Pavlopoulos acknowledged the problem, and claimed that Turkey exacerbated illegal immigration into Europe by failing to adequately police its borders. The Ambassador also raised the threat posed by the Kurdistan People's Congress (KGK) (formerly the PKK) and Pavlopoulos responded by highlighting the Greek intelligence service's cooperation with its Turkish counterpart. The Ambassador stressed USG concern with the lack of progress in the investigation into last year's rocket attack against the Embassy. Pavlopoulos agreed that the Greek Government needed to do more, and along with highlighting police cooperation with the Embassy, offered to have the counterterrorism prosecutor brief the Ambassador. The Interior Minister, however, expressed particular discomfort with the issue of cooperation on biometric identification technology to strengthen border controls, irrespective of its legality under the Greek law. Turning to the Visa Waiver Program, the Ambassador urged the Greek Government to eliminate unresolved issues and informed Pavlopoulos that another DHS team would be coming soon. End Summary.

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SUGGESTION TO AVOID INTERNAL POLITICS  
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¶2. (S) The Ambassador began the meeting by soliciting Interior Minister Pavlopoulos's advice for a new ambassador. Pavlopoulos suggested that the Ambassador should get to know the country and its people, who despite harboring dislike for American politics, have a strong affinity for the American people. He cautioned the Ambassador to avoid Greek internal politics and the perception that he is attempting to influence it. He said some U.S. Ambassadors in the past had been too public in their views on Greek internal affairs and advised the Ambassador to express opinions on such matters in private instead of publicly.

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COUNTERTERRORISM DOMINATES DISCUSSION  
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¶3. (S) Turning to counterterrorism issues, the Ambassador stressed the need for Greece to be attuned to the threat of international terrorism. Drawing from his experience in

Brussels, the Ambassador noted that Belgian modal of non-confrontation toward extremists did not work in the long term. The Ambassador highlighted the problem of illegal immigration and the real threat stemming from the potential for jihadis and extremists to hide among the thousands of Iraqi, Pakistani and other illegal immigrants entering Greece or transiting the country to other destinations in Europe. Pavlopoulos acknowledged the problem and said that the Turks exacerbated illegal immigration from the Middle East and South Asia. Pavlopoulos claimed Turkish authorities do not make serious efforts to control illegal migrants who cross their territory and allow -- and in some cases facilitate -- their passage to Greece. He asserted that currently there are 120 thousand Iraqi, Afghani and Pakistani migrants in Turkey waiting to cross into Greece. The Turks are aware of the problem but are not willing to do anything.

¶4. (S) The Ambassador also raised the threat posed by the Kurdistan People,s Congress (KGK) -- formerly known as the Kurdistan Workers, Party (PKK) -- and the need for greater cooperation against this organization. Pavlopoulos assured the Ambassador that the Greek National Intelligence Service (EYP) cooperated closely with the Turkish intelligence service on this issue. He said that a senior Turkish intelligence officer is now posted in Athens and enjoys a close relationship with EYP Director General Ioannis Coranidis. Pavlopoulos cited an example where two members of KGK were caught and extradited to Turkey following the bombing of a Turkish resort. Pavlopoulos claimed, however, that the Turks label many Kurds as KGK/PKK without evidence, and such allegations have to be investigated. These investigations, in turn, cause the EU to beat up Greece for having to slow its political asylum system.

¶5. (S) On domestic terrorism, the Ambassador pressed

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Pavlopoulos on the investigation of the RPG attack on the U.S. Embassy last year, emphasizing that such an attack on the symbol of our country and diplomatic compound needs to be met with a firm and determined response to ensure the perpetrators are found and punished. The Ambassador said that the Embassy planned to send an FBI special agent to assist this investigation. Pavlopoulos welcomed this and stated that the Hellenic Police enjoys a very close relationship with Embassy security and intelligence professionals and are sharing all the data. He offered the services of the Prosecutor for Counterterrorism Dimitrios Papangelopoulos, who is prepared to brief the Ambassador on progress in the investigation of the attack. Pavlopoulos assured the Ambassador that the police were not letting up their efforts in the investigation. At the same time, however, he noted that under his leadership Greek authorities had shifted away from confronting anarchists directly as former Public Order Minister Vyron Polydoras had done. Pavlopoulos claimed that he and the police were working quietly to address the anarchist problem, claiming this lack of public confrontation denies anarchists publicity and legitimization.

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OFFER OF ASSISTANCE FOR COUNTERTERRORISM . . .  
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¶6. (S) To assist international efforts to identify illegal immigrants and potential radical jihadis among them, the Ambassador described the Mission,s proposal to assist Greece in acquiring and using biometric data verification technology. The program would work within the parameters of Greek law and upgrade their paper and ink fingerprint methods with digital technology that would allow for rapid verification through databases that the U.S. Government could provide for Greek authorities. Pavlopoulos was cool to the idea, expressing discomfort with biometric systems. He did not reject the proposal out of hand, but cited not only legal but political sensitivities associated with privacy laws in

Greece. He underscored his misgivings by noting the role of the EU and scrutiny from human rights organizations and the media, and asked that we work with Prosecutor Papangelopoulos on this project. Pavlopoulos said the U.S. should push Turkey to more effectively control illegal migration at its borders and to collaborate more on this issue. (Comment: Pavlopoulos was noticeably cooler to this proposal than former MPO Minister Polydoras or the current Chief of the Hellenic Police Anastasios Dimoschakis, who agreed in principle. End comment).

¶7. (S) The Ambassador queried whether Greek counterterrorism laws were adequate to allow the Minister to do his job. Pavlopoulos said that they were adequate and that he had a hand in drafting them. He asserted that counterterrorism laws in Greece are stricter than most in other European countries. He said Greek law included provisions for prosecution for support to terrorist organizations, inciting terrorism, terrorism threats and intentions, as well as the use of the internet for terrorism.

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. . . AND FIREFIGHTING  
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¶8. (S) Describing his recent visit to the ancient site of Olympia, the Ambassador told Pavlopoulos that the United States would like to assist Greece with the problem of seasonal forest fires. The Ambassador reminded Pavlopoulos that United States donated 200 complete firefighting suits and had been surprised to learn that none had made it to Olympia. Pavlopoulos was grateful for any U.S. assistance and said his subordinates would be in touch with the Embassy's point-of-contact on the issue.

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THE VISA WAIVER PROGRAM  
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¶9. (S) The Ambassador reviewed the visa waiver process and the recent visit of the team from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and thanked Pavlopoulos for the Greek Government's excellent preparation for the visit and hospitality. The Ambassador urged the Greek Government to think creatively to eliminate any unresolved issues and informed Pavlopoulos that another team may be coming soon. Pavlopoulos expressed gratitude for the Embassy's role in preparing the Greek Government for the DHS visit and the hope that the Visa Waiver Program would be enacted soon.

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ATMOSPHERICS  
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¶10. (S) Both Pavlopoulos and Chinofotis were gracious hosts; the meeting was informal and lasted over an hour. Pavlopoulos, nevertheless, was particularly uncomfortable with the issue of cooperation on biometric border controls in the context of EU cautiousness on privacy issues, irrespective of its legality under the Greek law. Chinofotis, however, remarked that the Hellenic Police are already cooperating quietly with U.S. intelligence. He indicated that more public USG participation may not be welcomed but did not close the door on overt biometric cooperation on illegal immigrants. Chinofotis asked that the Ambassador pass on his regards to the Under Secretary of State Burns, whom he knows well.

SPECKHARD